

HABS No. IA-147

Town Of Oskaloosa  
Oskaloosa  
Mahaska County  
Iowa

HABS  
IOWA  
62-OSK,

                      
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF OSKALOOSA

HABS No. IA-147

HABS  
IOWA  
62-OSK,  
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- Location: Area generally bounded by High Avenue, West; High Avenue, North; and South B Street, Oskaloosa, Mahaska County, Iowa.
- Present Use: Targeted for demolition beginning fall 1984 to accommodate the Iowa Penn Central Regional Shopping Center.
- Significance: This area of Oskaloosa has a number of late nineteenth-century commercial buildings representing the oldest businesses in the western part of downtown Oskaloosa.
- Historian: Peter Sortino, et al., Urban Planning Programming Corporation, St. Louis, Missouri.
- Note: Some buildings were recorded individually for HABS. See HABS Nos. IA-167 through IA-186.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The town of Oskaloosa was originally platted by David Stump, the County Surveyor, in 1844. A quarter section had been chosen by the county commissioners to serve as their county seat. It was provided on the plat of the original survey that a public square should be the center of the quarter section.

The early settlement of Oskaloosa in 1844 consisted of only two stores and a small number of families living in primitive cabins. This settlement was to witness a great influx of travelers going westward and soon became a stagecoach stop.<sup>1</sup> The town grew steadily and frame buildings appeared among the log cabins. In 1845, William B. Street built the first frame store building on the west side of the square.

The west side of Oskaloosa developed before the east side. A large portion of the west side of the town was owned by Benjamin Roop, one of the county's earliest and most enterprising citizens. In 1851 he built a distillery and woolen mill on High Avenue West, eight blocks from the public square.

By 1851 the downtown commercial district was established around the public square. The commercial structures were a combination of brick and frame construction. Oskaloosa was incorporated as a city in 1853 with a population of approximately one thousand persons. The population continued to grow steadily.

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<sup>1</sup>Dorothy C. Clark, The Clendale Road--A Mill Named it: Mahaska County, Iowa (Oskaloosa: Clarks Craft, 1973).

Oskaloosa's growth and prosperity depended on the rich and abundant farm land of Mahaska and the surrounding counties. In 1864, the town had grown to more than 3,000 inhabitants and had become the principal commercial distribution center of an agricultural region unsurpassed in fertility and productiveness. The agricultural society was Oskaloosa's commercial foundation.<sup>2</sup>

By 1864, Oskaloosa boasted two public grade schools, one college, eight churches, two flour mills, one woolen factory, one pork packing-house, four hotels, one distillery, ten or twelve dry goods stores, four clothing stores, a state bank and a national bank.<sup>3</sup> At this time, the commercial district primarily still centered around the public square. Over time it began to fan out one block to the north, to the south and to the west. More and more brick structures were built in place of the frame structures that were more susceptible to fire. In 1863, six frame buildings on the south side of the square were destroyed by fire and replaced. In 1873, when these buildings were destroyed for the second time, the mayor of Oskaloosa, M. T. Williams, issued an order condemning all frame structures adjoining and surrounding the square.<sup>4</sup>

A coal boom began in the 1870s and within a few years caused the slowly developing town to become a city. Oskaloosa's population was 3,204 in the 1870 census and 4,263 by 1875.

Oskaloosa received its first railroad in 1871 when the Central Railroad of Iowa completed tracks between Albia and Mason City. This railroad became an important outlet for coal from Mahaska County to northern Iowa and Minnesota. Running north to south, the railroad came through the western portion of Oskaloosa with the depot located on High Avenue six blocks from the public square. Commercial development began to expand further west from the public square to meet the new railroad.

Oskaloosa later received the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, which ran east to west through the southern end of town, and the Burlington and Western Railroad, which ran from the south and ended in the western portion of the town with its depot on High Avenue five blocks west of the public square. The excellent railroad facilities in Oskaloosa were attractive to manufacturers and facilitated the city's access and growth.

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<sup>2</sup>Polk's Oskaloosa City Directory, 1947 (Omaha: R. L. Polk & Co., 1947), 17.

<sup>3</sup>"Oskaloosa Flourishing City," The Weekly Oskaloosa Herald, November 17, 1864.

<sup>4</sup>"Prominent Fires of Oskaloosa." Oskaloosa, Iowa, Folder, Box 28, Federal Writer's Project, Special Collections, University of Iowa Library, Iowa City, Iowa.

In September 1872, the north side of the square on High Avenue was rebuilt with the elegant "Exchange Block." The buildings were three stories, brick with iron fronts, arched doors and windows, and galvanized iron cornices.<sup>5</sup> These features became prevalent in later years among other commercial structures that were built around the square and to the west on High Avenue.

Coal production in Mahaska County peaked between 1891 and 1901 when there were thirty-one active mines employing about 2,300 men.<sup>6</sup> The offices of the coal mine operators were in Oskaloosa and the copious deposits of coal in Mahaska County brought millions of dollars to Oskaloosa, its commercial center.

The following businesses existed on High Avenue West in 1887, as listed in the city directory.

- 101 - Oskaloosa National Bank
- 102 - Lafferty and Morgan, Attorneys - 2nd floor
- 101 - B. F. Hall Barber Shop - basement
- 102 - Dwight F. Downing, Attorney - 2nd floor
- 103 - Green and Bentley, Drugstore
- 103 - Blanchard and Preston, Attorneys - 2nd floor
- 105 - Willard and Weeks Co., dry goods
- 107 - J. B. Brewster, boots and shoes
- 107 - McFall and Jones, Attorneys - 2nd floor
- 109 - Cruzen and Cruzen, groceries
- 109 - F. L. Christee, barber shop - basement
- 111 - W. A. Rinker, groceries
- 111 - J. H. Hockedy, barber shop - basement
- 113 - L. L. Hull, harness dealer
- 113 - M. P. Myer, barber shop - 2nd floor
- 114 - Imperial Bakery
- 116/118 - Byron S. Henry, furniture
- 117 - Whitaker and Shriver, books and stationery
- 119 - Dr. M. L. Jackson, dentist - 2nd floor
- 119 - Rader and Mowry, city pharmacy
- 119 - Hamilton and Edwards, painters - 2nd floor
- 121 - M. E. Bennett, insurance, real estate, loan agency - 2nd floor
- 122 - W. J. Davis, billiard hall
- 123 - Shaw and Campbell, groceries
- 123 - A. Q. Cox, barber shop - basement
  
- 201 - Wells and Gruwell, hardware
- 202-204 - Green and Thomas, agricultural implements
- 203 - Jasper Bates, jewelers

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<sup>5</sup>"Oskaloosa vs. United States," Fortune April 1938, 60.

<sup>6</sup>"Exchange Block," The Oskaloosa Herald, September 12, 1872.

205 - Charles Blattner, billiard hall  
206 - C. B. Gruwell and Co., drug store, jewelry  
207 - J. B. Adlon, pianos, organs, jewelry  
208 - J. Auer and Co., merchant tailor  
209 - Clipper Restaurant  
210 - Wing Lee, Chinese laundry  
211 - Clipper Grocery  
214 - Oskaloosa Marble and Granite Works  
215 - William Greenway, billiard hall  
217 - O. C. James, meat market  
217 - A. C. Simmons, painter - 2nd floor  
218 - Dr. T. K. Brewster, dentist  
221-223 - C. B. West and Co., agricultural implements

312 - Mrs. S. J. Wilkins, millinery  
317 - Chas. Lewis, painter-paper hanger  
321 - J. W. Oller, groceries  
323 - L. A. Swearngen, meat market

406 - Turner Bros., blacksmith  
413 - F. W. Cenevay, billiard hall  
415 - T. J. Henderson, drug store  
417 - E. E. Green, groceries  
419 - Frank Glaze, groceries  
421 - William Laffollett, groceries  
423 - T. J. Prescott, groceries

First Avenue West developed to a lesser degree at approximately the same time with two blocks to the west. The following businesses existed on First Avenue West in 1887.

102 - Dr. W. L. Crowder - 2nd floor  
106 - W. A. Sewers, pianos and organs  
108 - A. T. Dinkle, furniture  
109 - Searle and Stoddard, abstractors  
109 - Searle and Scott, attorneys  
109 - Hughes Bros., blacksmith  
110-112 - Asher House, hotel  
114 - William Harbach, furniture  
117 - W. H. Mead, billiard hall  
118 - Dr. Joseph Bevan - 2nd floor  
120 - M. W. Benjamin, pianos and organs  
120 - T. K. Smith, jewelers  
120 - Dr. E. L. Fitch - 2nd floor  
122 - W. Foulkes and Co., groceries  
124 - Herald Printing Co.

201-203 - J. G. Dow, billiard hall  
202-204-206 - H. L. Spencer, groceries

209-211 - Miller and Tolbert, blacksmith  
213-215-217 Jos. Jones, blacksmith  
220 - C. R. Bennett, restaurant  
222-224 - H. Snyder and Son, groceries

Few of the commercial structures built in the 1870s remain in the western portion of the downtown. The McCall Monuments building at 214 High Ave. West and the Rivola Theatre (originally J. H. Green and Company) were both constructed in 1874. Most of the structures in this area were built after 1880. By the early 1900s, High Avenue for three blocks west of the public square became the principal business street of Oskaloosa.<sup>7</sup> Over the years a mix of buildings ranging in age from the late 1870s into the 1900s and beyond developed.

All of the structures that remain from the early downtown development have been altered to some degree. The commercial structures found in this area are typical of a small, midwestern city and show a variety of architectural types. Oskaloosa was not settled by any distinct nationality; as a result, there is little specific ethnic architectural influence evident. The structures consist of two- and three-story brick buildings, many of which have architectural features of note, including hoodmolds, oriel windows, metal cornices, and cast-iron storefronts. Today, some structures house a variety of retail establishments, others are vacant. Several of the structures have deteriorated.

#### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

##### A. Interview:

An interview was held with Irma Glattly at her home in Oskaloosa on May 24, 1984. A charter and life member of the Mahaska County Historical Society, Mrs. Glattly is well known in Oskaloosa for her extensive knowledge of the city's history. She was recognized in 1982 by the Iowa State Historical Department, and in 1983 was named "Citizen of the Year" by the Oskaloosa Chamber of Commerce.

##### B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Library vertical files, Oskaloosa history and others, Oskaloosa Public Library, Oskaloosa, Iowa.

Mahaska County Transfer Books, Auditor's Office, Mahaska County Courthouse, Oskaloosa, Iowa.

Oskaloosa, Iowa, Folder, Boxes 28 and 29, Federal Writer's Project, Special Collections, University of Iowa Library, Iowa City, Iowa.

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<sup>7</sup>"Oskaloosa vs. United States," Fortune, April 1938, 55-56.

C. Secondary and published sources:

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Polk's Oskaloosa City Directories, 1876-77, 1887, 1898-99, and various years between 1900 and 1982.

Portrait and Biographical Album of Mahaska County. Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1887.

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PROJECT INFORMATION

Plans call for demolition of approximately seven city blocks in downtown Oskaloosa in phases beginning in fall 1984. This historical documentation of the western portion of the downtown area was completed by the Urban Programming Corporation during May, June and July of 1984. It is one portion of the historical/architectural recordation of the project area prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS).

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This documentation was completed under the direction of Gregory D. Kendrick, Historian for the National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Regional Office. Project supervisor was Peter Sortino of the Urban Programming Corporation. Historic documentation was completed by Diane Bowman of the Urban Programming Corporation. Photographer for the project was David W. Preston of St. Louis, Missouri.